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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001486

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO FAA, NTSB AND DOT  
DOT FOR KEVIN SAMPLE AND B ALLEN  
STATE ALSO FOR AF, AF/W, AF/PAS  
NSC FOR AF DIRECTOR MICHAEL MILLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2012  
TAGS: [FAIR](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: GON BEGINS KANO AIR CRASH INVESTIGATION;  
REQUESTS U.S. ASSISTANCE

REF: ABUJA 1429

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5(B) AND  
(D)

1. This cable contains an action request. See paragraph 8.

2.(U) Summary: In the aftermath of the May 4 air tragedy in Kano, the GON grounded all BAC1-11 aircraft until a full investigation is completed. A final death toll has not been tallied and we may never know the exact number of people who died as a result of the crash. Working with Consular Affairs, we determined that no American Citizens were killed in the crash. Reports indicate that both "black boxes" have been found, but not yet examined. The GON has established a panel to investigate the incident. The United States, Great Britain and, according to media reports, France have been asked to assist in the investigation. End Summary.

3.(U) At least five Nigerian airlines are affected by the GON ban on flying BAC1-11 enacted immediately after the crash. Executive Airline Services (EAS), owner of the crashed plane, is effectively grounded; its two other craft are BAC1-11. The GON also announced that over the next five years it will be gradually taking offline all aircraft over 22 years. Aviation Minister Chikwe insists this measure has been on the books since last month and that it is not a reaction to the May 4 crash.

4.(U) Chikwe also announced the formation of a panel to investigate the crash. According to media reports the panel will consist of eight Nigerian officials and one representative each from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United States Department of Transportation, the British Civil Aviation Authority and the French Civil Aviation Authority. The panel is expected to determine the cause(s) of the accident and assess the operation of Nigeria's private aviation industry with regard to safety and maintenance of aircraft. (Comment: The idea of forming the panel is good. However, in attempting to give the public the impression that they are doing all they can and that the panel will have the requisite expertise, the Ministry jumped the gun in claiming the USG has agreed to furnish an expert. We clearly have not made such a commitment; however, we will attempt to clarify this with the Ministry. End comment.)

5.(C) Unfortunately, it has not taken long for some people to find ways to make political capital from the tragedy. The House of Representatives has tasked its Committee on Aviation to conduct a full investigation. Meanwhile a National Assembly member from Kano introduced a measure calling for the GON to rebuild all homes damaged by the crash.

6.(C) The United States and Great Britain have both been asked to help the GON conduct its investigation of the crash. UK High Commissioner Philip Thomas told Ambassador Jeter that, like us, the UK had been asked by Minister Chikwe for assistance investigating the crash and in establishing a better regulatory regime for the purchase and maintenance of commercial aircraft. Thomas has forwarded the request to London but said that the request was too general. While the UK wanted to be helpful, he remarked Nigeria would need to make a more detailed request specifically outlining the help they required from the UK before London would formally agree to participate.

7.(C) Ambassador Jeter agreed with The High Commissioner that

the GON request was vague. The vagueness is a function of the lack of expertise on how to proceed in the face of such a tragedy. The Ambassador suggested to the High Commissioner that an appropriate interim step might be to send an expert or two to help the Nigerians develop a precise scope of work for the investigative panel and to help it precisely delineate the assistance wanted from the U.S., UK and perhaps others. Thomas liked this approach, stating that he would relay the suggestion to London as well. (Note: Thomas did not appear to be aware that ICAO protocols may give the UK an affirmative responsibility to assist with the investigation since the aircraft was of British manufacture. However, according to media reports EAS has a maintenance agreement with Tarom, the Romanian firm which sold EAS the BCl-11 fleet, so the responsibility may lie with Bucharest. End note.)

18. (U) Action Request: The Embassy requests that Washington consider sending one or two persons to Nigeria to assist the GON to develop a scope of work for the Kano crash investigations panel. Post also requests guidance from DOT to respond to a separate Ministry of Aviation request for technical assistance in areas of airline purchasing, safety, and maintenance oversight. We understand that this type of assistance is already being provided under the USAID-funded Nigerian Transportation Assistance Program, but the Ministry has requested additional, expedited assistance in this area.

JETER